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Mexico is plum in Moscow's eye

Which is the greater threat to the United States: Soviet nuclear deployment, among the topics being discussed this week at Geneva, or Soviet infiltration of agents and ideas into every thread of the fabric of life in next-door Mexico?

The talk this week is about arms control between the Soviet Union and the United States against a backdrop of speculation about a "star wars" plan that would bring Pac-Man into the world of national security.

Newspaper and television graphics remind us what we already knew: Both Moscow and Washington possess enough land-based, sea-based and air-launched missiles and warheads to blow both world capitals, and probably both countries and much of the rest of the world, to smithereens.

Meanwhile, far away from Geneva, the quiet but relentless machinations of the Soviet Union continue with scant coverage from newspapers and television. The American public is aware of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the occupation by Vietnam, Moscow's surrogate, of Kampuchea. Soviet support of Cuba and the Marxist regime in Nicaragua is well-documented.

A less publicized battlefield is Mexico.

The tactics and methods utilized by the Kremlin to make Mexico a communist country have been more subtle, more intelligent, more prolonged and more efficient than the programs of violent revolution pushed in Cuba and Central America.

Mexico is a supreme prize in Moscow's unhurried game plan of isolating the United States. Twenty-five countries have been subdued by communists since the end of World War II. Could Mexico be next? Or, will communism's steady drive south of the border be blunted by traditional societal factors that will delay a definitive communist takeover?

To most Americans, even talking about the possibility of Mexico going communist sounds a bit goofy. You know, "It can't happen there."

Mexican journalist Manuel Moreno Rivas not only believes that it can happen there. He says it is happening there. In a recent speech in Tucson, Ariz., Mr. Rivas said: "At the present moment you can find thousands of Soviet agents mixed up in every political organization and movement, receiving orders issued by the Kremlin and passed on by the Russian Embassy in Mexico City." Mr. Rivas says the Soviet agents in Mexico City are superbly trained.

"Those diplomats and agents — in appalling contrast with the ones your State Department supplies — receive magnificent training, specializing in the knowledge of the country in which they are involved. They know the psychology of the Mexicans and how they react to different incentives and pressures," he said. The Mexican journalist is not the first to warn of the intensive activity of the Soviet Union's operatives in Mexico. Soon to become the world's most populous city, Mexico City is widely referred to as the "spy capital" of the Americas. The United States makes it difficult for KGB agents to move around in this country. In Mexico, there are virtually no restrictions. Cuban, Vietnamese and Nicaraguan agents come and go with ease.

In several recent instances, Americans implicated in spying activities for the Soviet Union have admitted going to Mexico City for instructions and payoffs.

A most disturbing fact is the pervasive influence in Mexican education of Communist Party members. The present minister of education in Mexico, Agustin Reyes Heróles, is said by Mr. Rivas and others to have strong communist ties. Mexico has tremendous natural resources and human assets, but they have been squandered under the presidencies of Luis Echeverría and Jose Lopez Portillo.

There are signs of comeback under President Miguel de la Madrid but severe economic damage has been done. International communism cannot take credit or blame for all of Mexico's disarray, but Moscow's agents are working overtime to erode the systems of mutual benefit between the United States and Mexico.

One line of argument against the thesis of Mr. Rivas and others that communism is making deep inroads in Mexican life is that the Mexican "establishment" of intertwined allegiances and political ties would never allow outright communist political participation.

The problem with that line of reasoning is that it is hard to imagine what the political situation would be in the face of possible severe economic deterioration and government immobilization due to lack of confidence by the Mexican populace.

The "worst case" scenario for Mexico is every bit as frightening for the United States as are some of the nuclear war contingencies that were kicked around this week at Geneva.

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